

Silhouette

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Article 1

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Silhouette (Women's Forum)

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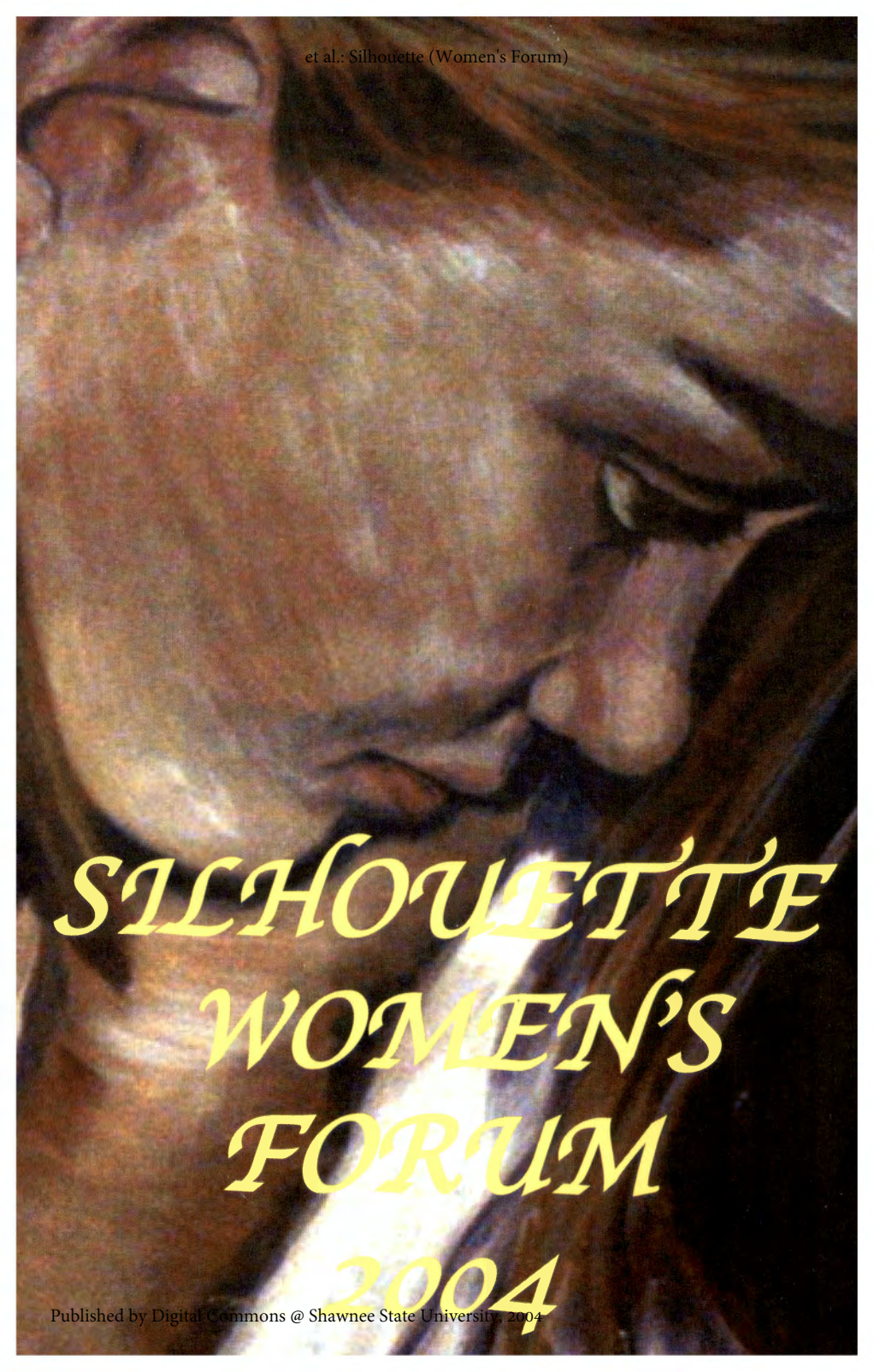
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et al.: Silhouette (Women's Forum)

*SILHOUETTE
WOMEN'S
FORUM*

2004

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Editor in Chief:
Elsie Shabazz

Layout Editor:
Hank Waring

Women's Forum Selection Committee
Brandy Chandler - student
Roberta Milliken - faculty
Tess Midkiff - administrator
Laura Beth Pottinger - student
Carol Sexton- staff
Elsie Shabazz - staff

The SSU Women's Forum's mission is to promote, advocate, educate, and support the women of Shawnee State University and the community at large.

For more information on the Women's Forum, go to:
www.shawnee.edu/comm/wforum

Correspondence should be directed to:
Shawnee State University
Women's Forum
940 Second Street
Portsmouth, OH 45662
e-mail: rmilliken@shawnee.edu

Cover Art by Elizabeth Elaine Hinton...Oil on masonite
Cover Design by Hank Waring.....Photo-Shop

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ART:

Gail Ingalsbe	..... 3, 21, 33, 38
Barbara Burke	..... 6
Thema Shirey	..... 18
Laura Beth Pottinger	..... 20, 35
Mica Stettner	..... 25
Donna Carr	..... 29, 30
Sherri Powell	..... 34
Jo Koenig	..... 37
Sherri Bolden	..... 39
Linus Project	..... 14
Unknown	..... 32, 47

WRITTEN WORD:

Laura Beth Pottinger	..... 2-3, 34
Vanessa Bentley	..... 4
Roberta Milliken	..... 5-13
Scott Minar	..... 15
Carolyn Joyce Pottinger	..... 17
Jené Wright	..... 17
Jennifer Phillips	..... 19, 49-52
Robert Forrey	..... 22-23
Pat Spradlin	..... 24
Kelly Alburg	..... 26-28
Joan Scott	..... 31
Renae Wilkerson	..... 36
Pat Sowards	..... 40, 48
Lisa Jones	..... 41-47



Stainless Steel Pan

Laura Beth Pottinger

Tired and feathered arms
bathe and rinse dinner plates.

Circular motions sanitize the walls
of the large pan heavy, stern, solid.
Bleached.

Rinsed.

Shiny again in places
Tired and feathered in places;
black and gray camouflage.

But drowned again; another duty
Resting over and cradled by fuming flames.

Slumped and tired

Unsteady, wobbling, shaking

Just right.

Four fingers wrap around

bold,

solid

handles.

A solid grip.

Pruned hands, stiffened by
strength,

Willingly deliver three gallons of pan water
to the bathroom tub;

the next child's bath.

No food to remove.

Drowned again. Another duty.

Four fingers wrap around

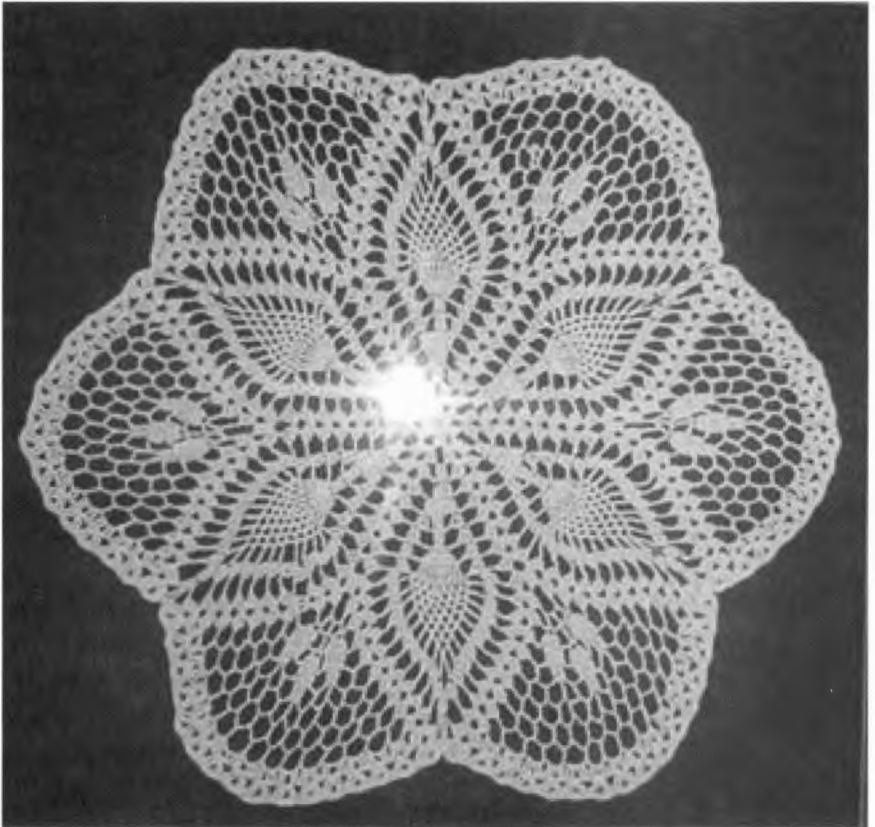
bold,

solid

handles.

A solid grip.

Mammaw's hands stiffened with
strength,
willingly deliver water
to the kitchen.
No complaints
knowing she has carried a heavier load;
No water at all.



Untitled

Gail Ingalsbe

Fabric

The Ocean

Vanessa Bentley

I walked all alone into the soft summer
Shimmering rays rose their hands to greet me
Colors of orange, yellow, blue and red bathed
My face and arms as the hungry waves of the
Shore explored by muddy feet.

I looked down upon the shining sand
A starfish watched me reproachfully and then
Winked at me.

Picking it up, I slipped it into the pocket of
my blue-suede bathrobe; I would add another
Friend to my beautiful collection.

I looked up and saluted the spacious blue skies
A seagull spread its wings and took flight from
The palm tree on the other shore.
Sighing deeply, I began walking back to the boathouse
Time to breathe the warm ocean air was gone;
Sunshine was hidden.

Learning to Swear

Roberta Milliken

I remember my mother telling me that when she turned 21, my grandfather handed her a martini and said, “Remember, ladies never have two.” The funny thing is that while at the time—which happened to be my 21st birthday—we giggled over the silliness of such advice, back then, my mother took it to heart. I guess she didn’t really have a choice because that was the time of ladies—real ladies, like Jackie Kennedy, all quiet and big-eyed pretty in patent leather and lipstick. And they had different rules then. My mother’s book from her etiquette class told her that good boys always walked on the sidewalk closest to traffic when escorting girls home. The bad boys—drawn with wolf heads—smoked, drank, and cared so little for their girlfriends that they left them exposed and unprotected to the traffic. I used to like to thumb through the slim volume. It told young ladies what to wear and what not to, how to act, and what to talk about—which was very little since silent modesty was valued above all else. This 64 page (illustrations included) book purported to have all the answers; it was the authoritative instruction book on how to be a lady.

That’s not to say that anyone actually fit the mold the book declared all real ladies fit—even though most tried. My mother didn’t, mostly, I think, because she was an artist and just seemed to see the world differently than most. It was as if she saw everything as beauty in the making, the whole world in various stages of becoming.

“Hmmm, what do you see here, Rob?” she’d say as she opened her sketchpad to a new page and plopped down on the couch.

“Nothing.”

“Are you sure? Look harder—I think something’s there,” she’d coax as I, a bored five year old, balanced on the back of the couch looking over her shoulder.

“Uhhh, I don’t know. . . . Maybe a rabbit’s there?”

“Why I think you’re right. I see her ears and her little twitching nose,” she’d say as she quickly sketched out what she described. “And what is that silly little rabbit doing? Get your crayons and help.”

This was just the beginning. Before long we’d have several complete pictures and a story to go along with them. I thought my mother was magic the way she’d effortlessly draw whatever I “saw”—but she’d always say that anyone could do it if she really wanted to and if she practiced. She had started when she was just a little girl—“When I was just about your age,” she’d say.

Of course, she had also gone to college and majored in art. She liked to tell me about how she and her classmates balanced like acrobats on two-by-fours and skipped across the airy, fiberglass floors of the unfinished attics and basements of Ohio University to do their work—and, God, they made some beautiful stuff. My favorite by far was the Mer-Madonna. Almost a Mermaid, not quite a Madonna, she was made of plaster and fortified internally by a wire skeleton of sorts. She was naked, almost life-sized, and reclined easily with her hair falling down loose and free around her shoulders. My mother laughed when she told me how shocked her parents were when they came to pick her up and saw her statue. First of all, the Mer-Madonna was naked; secondly, their daughter had created her; and thirdly, they had to take it home. I like to picture the Mer-Madonna gloriously reclining across the top of the Plymouth, adored like a saint on a feast day on her trip back to Pittsburgh. But that’s not how it happened. Instead, my mom told me how my grandparents blushed and puzzled over it for a long time until my grandfather finally decided to smother her in blankets and strap her down to the roof of the car—not so much out of fear of breaking her as much as out of embarrassment: he wanted to hide her from society’s eyes.

But it ended well enough when a few years later my mom and dad bought their house. Then she was liberated and lounged in our garden surrounded by red roses and daisies. I thought she was beautiful. I remember dancing around her in the backyard, singing and twirling in the sunshine until I thought I heard her join in. Or I'd decorate her with dandelions and clover chains. I'd pretend that she was my glamorous friend or a queen who'd surprised me with a visit and offer her purple Kool-aid in Dixie cups. Reclining against her cool lap, we'd have long chats among the bumblebees as we discussed my important future.

When I look back on it now, during this time, the time of my childhood, my mother must have worked hard to fit her art into her expected role as wife and mother, but it was difficult—mostly because she had to bury her art underneath the happy homemaker model everyone applauded. I think she tried to become a selfless superwoman whose days were consumed by cleaning, gardening, shopping, and caring for the kids and her man, but this meant that she had little real time for herself.

I distinctly remember the first time I caught her working her art late at night. I was very young and had had a bad dream, so I called out for her; not getting an answer, I ventured into the darkness to find her. After timidly looking in all the usual places, I finally found her on the back porch, bent over a sketch, quietly humming along with the soft classical music in the background. I stood and watched her as she gave a backhanded swipe at a loose strand of hair and carefully chose another piece of charcoal until I jealously thought she should have noticed me.

"Mom, I had a bad dream," I sobbed.

Nothing.

"Mom! Mom! I had a bad dream!" I cried more insistently.

She jumped and turned. For a half a second, she looked at me as if she didn't know me, and then in one movement her eyes filled with comprehension and she swept me up in her arms.

"Oh, you poor thing. What are you having bad dreams for? Didn't I tell you only good dreams were allowed?" She kissed and patted me all the way back to my bed before she tucked me in again.

From then on, whenever I woke in the middle of the night, I'd always check the back porch. If I didn't interrupt an art project she was working on, I'd find her curled up in the wicker rocker, staring off tiredly in the direction of the garden and the Mer-Madonna.

Of course, whenever it was possible she worked art, though not necessarily her art, into her daytime routines. Now, I believe it was because she must have decided somewhere along the way that since she didn't necessarily have time to do what she would have liked to have done if left to her own devices, she would try to teach art and an appreciation of it to her children. And when I think about it, it's not like she really had a choice. They say, "Truth will out." Well, I think, "Art will out," too. With my mother it just came out naturally and constantly, so everyday things and acts became objects and occasions for artwork. We spent a whole afternoon in the summer making elaborately decorated sailboats out of milk cartons. I remember I worked so long and hard on mine that I was reluctant to actually put it in the water once it was done. And going to birthday parties was always a proud event because my mother spent so much time wrapping the presents. Debbie Duff's Barbie looked like a fancy car and Beth Pearson's Twister game was disguised as a bird's nest. "Oh, your mother is so creative!" the mothers would gasp and coo as I was greeted at the door. "Wherever does she find the time?!" Even trips to the beach were never simply times for swimming; they were also times for sand castings and driftwood gatherings. The castings, if they made it home in one piece, would decorate our porch for a while, and the driftwood would be used in a countless number of other crafts like macramé hangings and wood burnt statues.

Looking back on it, my mother made sure my other siblings and I had rather charmed childhoods. While the Mer-Madonna quietly watched from her bed of flowers, we learned to sit up straight at the dinner table and how to write thank you notes after receiving gifts; and while the tendrils of roses slowly snaked

around her arms and torso, we also learned to make Ukrainian eggs at Easter and tie-dyed our own bed sheets. There were the usual rough moments—like when we got sick with the typical childhood illnesses, but through them all, my mother was a cheerful and reliable constant. That's why it was such a surprise when the cancer came.

It came like a winter storm: it was quick, quiet, and intense. It was also cruel, for it took away what was perhaps my mom's greatest solace and source of energy. The tumor ate away at her until she could barely hold a pencil steady enough to write her name let alone draw a straight line. She did continue to try to sketch, however, though it was frustrating for her. "I call them my dancing hands," my mom tried to laugh as the charcoal she held bobbed and waved. She tried to be cheerful, but it really was the ultimate betrayal, almost as if her body and the disease were trying to contain her, fold her up and squelch her once and for all.

By the time she realized it was there, there was nothing she could do. Fighting it seemed to accomplish as much as ignoring it. My mother did a little of both. She started chemotherapy and went in for radiation treatments, but I also remember her angrily slapping the slim white booklet about brain tumors against her palm. "This, well, I just don't think you need waste your time with it." She turned and threw it up on a top shelf in her closet and looked at me, her eyes brimming, "I just don't think it'll help."

But just as the cancer seemed to rob and cheat her, it also freed her in a new and strange way. Suddenly things that used to matter a lot—like the "proper" ways of doing things—didn't matter at all. She started to change. My mother, of course, knew the truth and thus seemed intent upon trying to cram every second of life into every minute of the days she had left. Part of this frenzy included an odd delight in breaking some of the rules she was raised with. The most notable was that she started swearing. It was remarkable. The whole phenomenon was so unnatural for her that it took her a long time to spit out the forbidden curse. So

at first, her approach was a gradual one, almost like a pitcher's calculated wind-up to a throw. I remember her coming home from school angry at another teacher's callous remarks to a parent. "Well, I'm sorry, but she's just a . . . just a . . . a . . . just a . . . bitch." Out. There it was. "Bitch." I can still see my mom's wide-eyed amazement at the word itself that she put out there as she was talking to her daughter. It lasted an instant before it changed to a broad, naughty smile. She liked it.

That was just the beginning. After that, my mom started swearing more regularly. "Oh, shit," she'd mutter pulling burnt cookies out of the oven, or "Bitch, bitch, bitch," she'd giggle to me and my complaining sister. But don't get me wrong—even though my mother started to swear a lot, she never quite mastered cursing so that it sounded natural. No matter how much she practiced, the words still awkwardly tripped off her tongue almost like she was pronouncing a foreign phrase for the first time. And it was strange to see this lady who never let her children even say "God," purposefully trying to swear. No, she never really did get the hang of it, but she certainly did enjoy trying.

She enjoyed breaking other rules too. The same woman who once warned me against getting a bad reputation, started encouraging my small social rebellions. While my other relatives looked at each other with their eyebrows raised, she was delighted when I lit up and chewed on a cigar with the men celebrating the birth of a new cousin. "Oh, what do they know? You just do what you think is right," she said when I decided that I didn't want to dissect a frog in biology class. She even sent me (instead of either of my older brothers) to confront the bullies who were harassing my younger brother on his way home from school. "You can handle it. Just wait by the garage," she advised, "and if they start bothering him, grab them by the scruffs of their necks and make them understand that they will no longer be bothering that child or they'll be very sorry."

All this time, it was hard to remember that my mom was sick. Even though her hands shook and she had lost her hair, she burned like an ember with intensity and purpose. She still, for

instance, proposed various art projects to me and my other siblings. “How about we play clay this afternoon, Rob?” she’d say over coffee in the morning. I remember her pulling off a handful of clay and throwing it to the canvas-covered floor again and again making sure to get all the dangerous air bubbles out before we’d begin. “What a way to get your frustrations out,” she’d giggle as she slapped another piece down. I had moved to Dayton by then, but came home on weekends to help my mother and father. With the Mer-Madonna silently looking on, we’d often pass Saturday afternoons happily on the back porch elbow deep in some project or another. But, of course, this didn’t last.

When I called my mother that Sunday, she sounded very, very far away. She and my father had gone to a wedding the day before. They had laughed and danced. But now, she said she just couldn’t sleep enough—for some reason she was exhausted. Later the next day my sister called to say our mother was in the hospital. Since she had started chemo again, her body’s natural defenses were way down and pneumonia had set in.

I found her lost in thought reclining on propped pillows and staring out her window with the far away back porch look in her eye. When she noticed me, she managed a weak smile.

“Oh, you didn’t have to come, Rob.”

“I know, but here I am. How are you feeling?”

A nurse interrupted her reply. “I need some more blood, honey,” she said as she swished by.

“More? Really?”

“I just follow orders, honey. Can you sit up more for me? Good girl.” The nurse looked over her arm carefully and stuck her twice before she decided to use a vein in her other arm. “Okay, there we go. You just sit back and relax now.” The nurse patted my mother’s shoulder and swished out.

I had never seen my mother look so worn out. “I’m so tired of all these needles—being poked and prodded—I feel like I’m a pin cushion.” She turned and looked at me. “You should see the needles they give you the chemo with. The first time I

saw them. . . well. . .” she trailed off. “You know, Rob, I don’t think I’m going to do it anymore. It just doesn’t seem worth it.” Her eyes were full of sadness. “I mean I have to think of the quality of life—my life—not just the quantity.” She took a breath, “I don’t think I’m going to do it anymore.”

Before I had time to swallow the lump that was forming in my throat, two white coats flitted past me. I hadn’t even heard them come in. One was her doctor who had come to tell her of a new test he wanted to perform. He licked his big white teeth before he explained that he wanted to stick a tube down her throat into her lung to draw out a sample of the fluid that was building up in there. He could then analyze it and prescribe the antibiotics that would best fight the infection. I wondered if my mother noticed his wolf-like green eyes as he wrote in his clipboard. Not once did he really look at her or me, and without waiting for any questions or even a response, he finished his writing, clicked his pen and was gone. The orderly followed him, wheeling my mother away down the long corridor to the Intensive Care Unit.

I had to run to catch up to my mother. I grabbed her hand as she was rolled toward the elevator.

“Whatever you want, Mom. . . whatever. It’ll be all right. I love you. I’ll be here, and I’ll tell Dad. . . .”

“I love you too, Rob.”

Those were the last words I heard her say. The doors to the elevator shut, and she was gone. Before they even received the results of the test, she had a terrible seizure and slipped into a comatose state. Two days later, she was dead.

I didn’t sleep well for days after my mom’s death and all the social madness that accompanied it. Finally, the afternoon after her funeral, I wandered into my old bedroom. I don’t remember lying down on the bed or drifting off to sleep, but I awoke much later to the moon shining in my face, as bright as any star. I went to the open window and looked out. Everything was still—full of waiting—for what I wasn’t sure. The smell of warm violets lingered as I bent against the windowsill and leaned

my forehead against the cool glass. Quiet but not calm. The whole yard seemed alive with moonlight and at the center of it all reclined the Mer-Madonna. She was older now. Yellowed flakes of plaster peeled back exposing wire here and there, and one arm was severed above the elbow. I could only see her upper torso; the rest of her body was lost in the jungle of roses and over-grown daisies. Even in her decay, she still possessed her regal air. The grass was wet and cool on my feet as I stepped through the window. I stood looking down at the Mer-Madonna until I thought I saw my mother's face—then mine—and finally the moon in her dreamy, half-lidded eyes. I sank to my knees and started weeding. By morning I had unburied her again and for what, I swore, was the last time.



WOMEN'S FORUM

Left:

**Log Cabin
Design**

Linus Project

Fabric



Right:

Nine Patch Design

Linus Project

Fabric



Over The Fence

Scott Minar

*"These mothers would throw their children over
the fence hoping that some kind stranger would
catch them and raise them as their own."*

Holocaust narrative

What the child sees in its arc
over wire is secret.

Hope sometimes

into the arms of a stranger.

Mother to mother the children fly
like origin, pales of shivering water.

Landing is like falling leaves, bent sheets
of snow hitting the pavement.

And those left behind, on the other side
of the fence? They grab the weather
of their story and hold on.

Right:

**Friendship Star
Quilt**

Barbara Burke

Fabric



Left:

**Ohio Fences
Design**

Barbara Burke

Fabric



The Lone White Crow

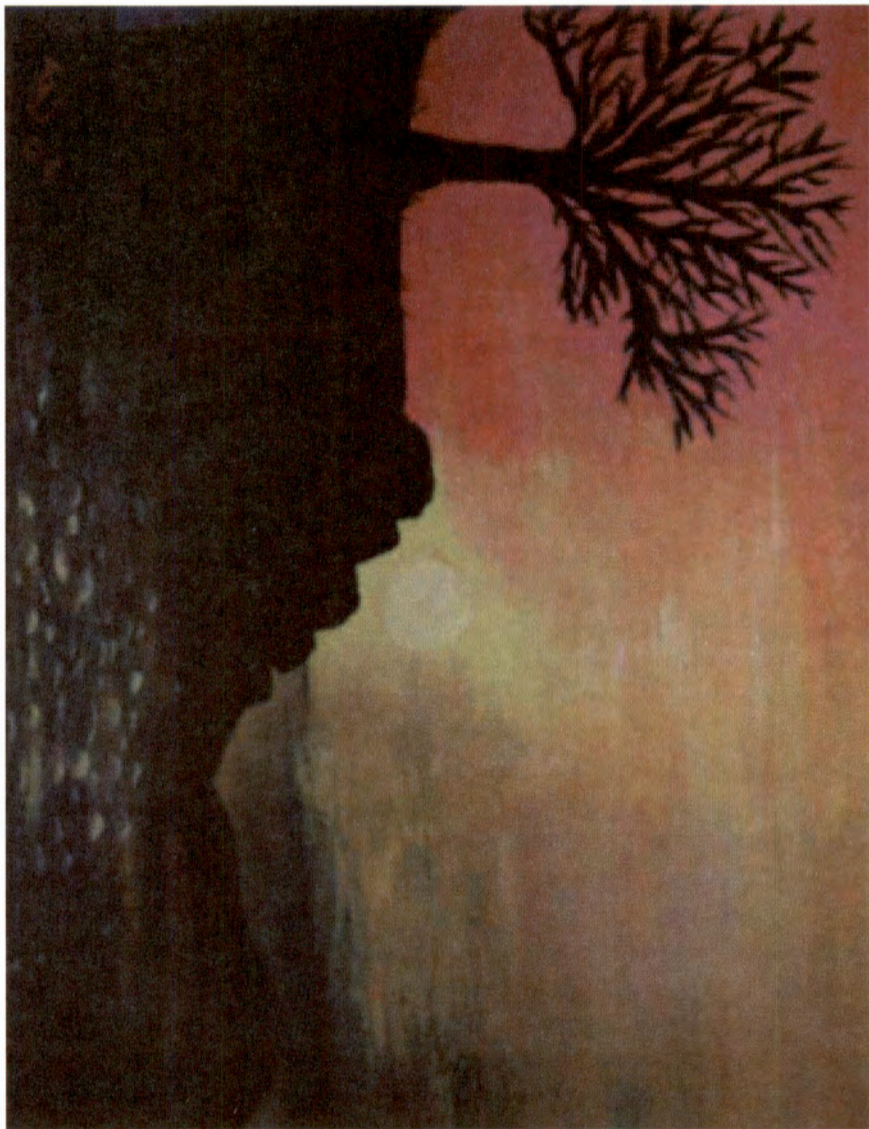
Carolyn Joyce Pottinger

Dark forboding forest
Once held her captive.
Alone now she turns
to new horizons.
She no longer is encased
in the cage of blackiron bars.
Forever searching the skies
for danger from the hunter
who would like to destroy her.
The lone white crow
emerges triumphant over her captor
and flies above the clouds of
doubt and bewilderment
to a sky full of opportunitites.

To Be a Woman

Jené Wright

She is...
A Worthy Companion,
An Openhearted Soul,
An Intellectual Mind,
An Extraordinary Artist,
She is WOMAN.



Sunset Sky

Thelma Shirey

Acrylic

Pre-Raphaelites

Jennifer Phillips

Mock goddesses
Half-nude under a cloud of auburn waves
Wistfully they feed upon Pomegranates
and music of lutes
Porcelain-skinned and bare breasted
Want and desire emerges in their eyes
Purchase Ophelias and nymphs for your walls
Mr. Waterhouse, paint me a lady
Pacing thrice in a room
and feed the hungry masses
Under the great dome in the park.

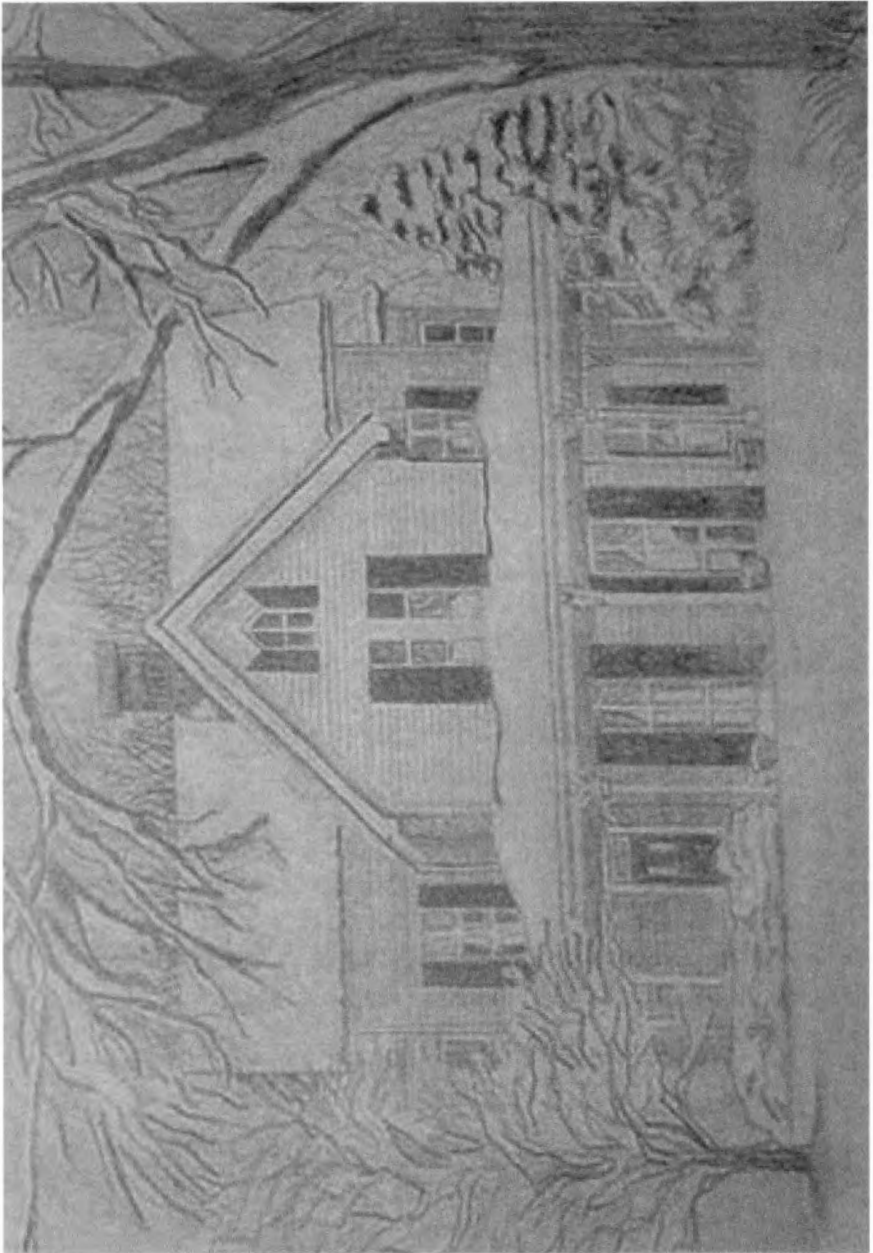




Siamese

Laura Beth Pottinger

Watercolor



Winter Home

Gail Ingalsbe

Graphite



Perseverance

Robert Forrey

Marie Curie-Sklodowska overcame twin prejudices, as a woman and as a foreigner in France, to become a pioneer in the field of radiation, the harmful effects of which contributed to her death by leukemia, in 1934. She shared in the Nobel prize for physics in 1903 and was the sole recipient in chemistry in 1911. Her feminist daughter, Irene, who also died of leukemia, shared the Nobel prize for chemistry with her husband, in 1935.

The mystic substance kept on calling her
back to the damp cold shed provided
by the stingy French bureaucracy.

She wrote later, "But what of that?
We must have perseverance, and above all
confidence in ourselves. We must believe
that we are gifted for something and that this thing,
at whatever cost, must be attained."

Her husband was just as determined.
"Whatever happens, even if one
has to go on like a body without a soul,
one must work just the same." They worked
the way the Trappists prayed – day and night –
she stirring a bubbling vat of evil-looking pitchblende
in the yard – smoke darkening the sky –
he making calculations in the shed.

She brought him back one night to see the stuff
glowing mystically in glass containers –
it was a night she always remembered.

After he was crushed on the Rue Dauphine
by a wagon loaded with uniforms
she carried on for decades with her daughter,
developing a treatment for cancer
at the same time she was contracting it.

Like a Polish peasant in her garden,
she moved each day among the vials
blooming beautifully in the lab,
handling them gently with fingers
that would not heal, with faith that would not die,
the discovery for which she religiously
worked herself to death
glowing at night, burning to marrow.



Our Warrior's Captivating Reflection

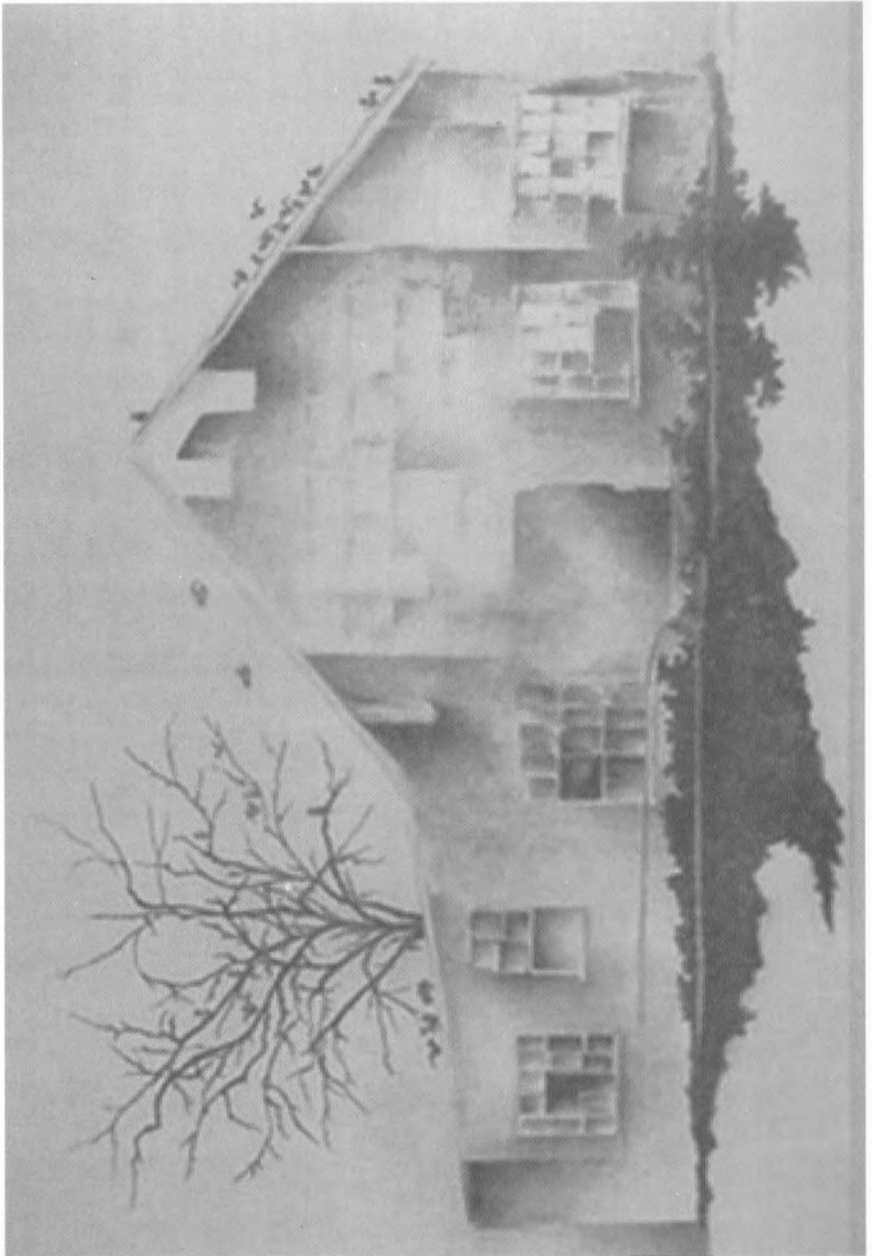
Pat Spradlin

Your flashes of fire soared into velvet darkness
and your flame-breathing furnace sparkled
fragments on us like firecrackers
raining on children at a Fourth of July Celebration.

Your steam blasted smoky billows into clouds
while you stood, a regal silhouette, a
woman warrior, a captivating reflection
sparkling in the still watercolors of the Ohio River.

Our men spent their lives in you,
and you swallowed their youth.
in tribute, we built red brick row houses
for families and worked twelve hour shifts
feeding your hunger with molten fuel.

And then we watched you die
leaving us alone in this river carved valley
with vacant, crumbling houses, deserted stacks and empty skies
waiting for a newer warrior's silhouette in muddy waters
that reflect only our faces.



Untitled

Mica Stettner

Graphite

The Gospel of the Sun

Kelley Alburg

I wrapped myself in my daughter's blanket
on a scorching August day
because I could find no warmth
in the house.

I laid in that blanket and breathed
my sweet, pungent morning breath
until each breath consumed the other
and I suffocated.

My toes twitched,
my hands numbed,
I closed my eyes,
and slept.

I woke up lying on the sun.

I was melting.
My skin bubbled and hissed at the sun,
my hands disappeared, and
my feet became sole yellow.
As my face slid across the sun's eyes,
she blinked and blinked and blinked
until I poured from her
as a fiery rain.

I poured hot into jungles,
those dangerously overgrown jungles
where fathers hide their children
from Lesbians,
where even noisy Macaws silently
guard these secret hiding places.
Yet, i was unstoppable and unforgiving.
I moved as lava (dragging the Macaws)

forcing the children back into their mother's arms---
mothers who wept into cool blankets
on scorching August days.

I dove madly into oceans,
raged across deserts,
and dumped sad and salt onto
small town streets heavy with debris.
I swept under billboards which
screamed scripture from the Book of Leviticus,
wound down church alleys,
across couthouse lawns,
and into houses of women who hate
women who love women,
but found no one to drown.

A town meeting was called
on my behalf, and the people
gathered into the night.
Plans were devised,
Bibles gathered
and Jesus dies all over again.

When morning broke,
hauntingly sunless and still,
they waited for me at the edge of town
with hoses and Bibles and prayers.
They washed me down into the sewers,
covered me with rusty manhole
and left me there to be swallowed
by bloated rats.

in these wormed bellies
I lay dormant and soured
and rose like acid in the rats' throats.
They screeched choked, vomited
and I breathed once again.

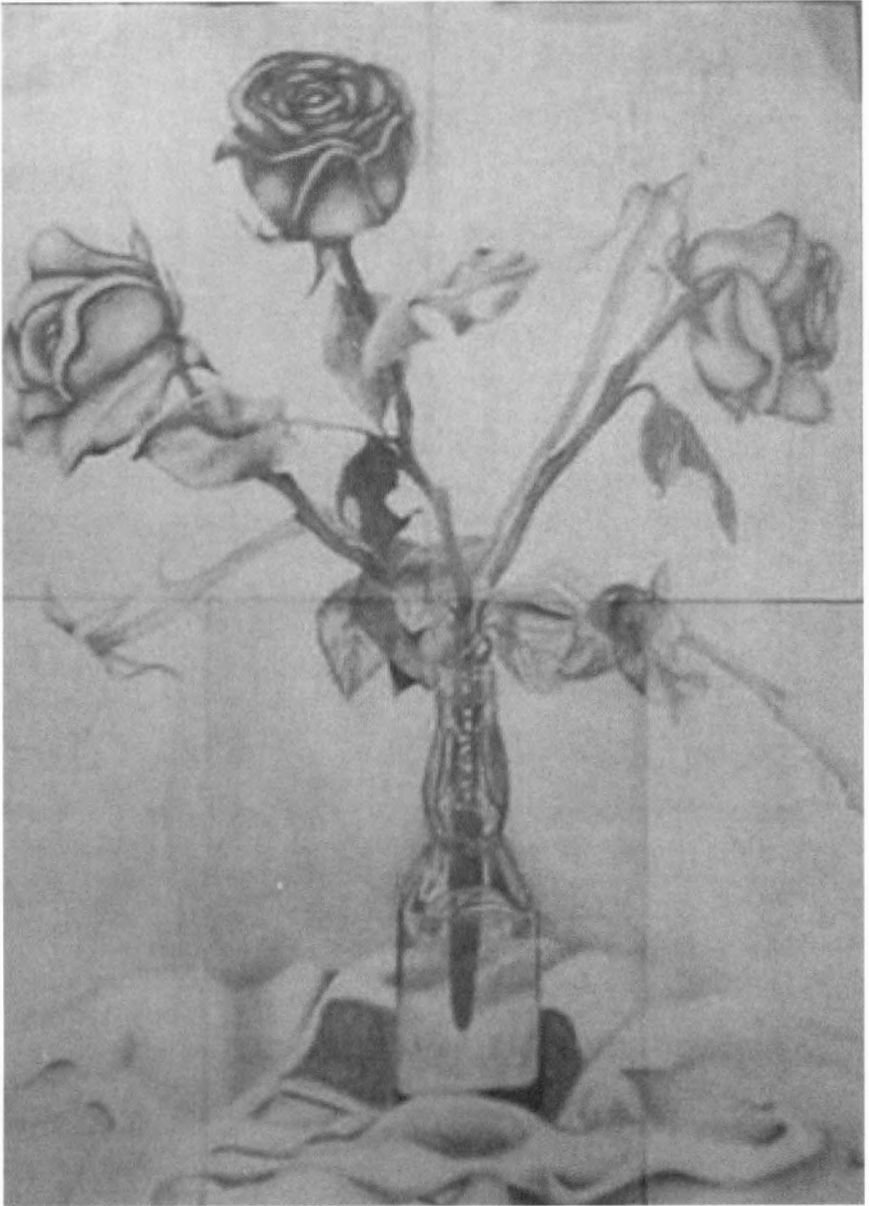
I flowed, unrelentless, for years
Until I reached the edge of the world.
Poised on a ledge above Jerusalem
I could finally be still.

The sun rose hot and settled on my back.
I closed my eyes and waited.
Gently, she sucked me into her mouth,
breathed me in as golden air,
 exhaled,
and the earth cracked cold from drought.



WOMEN'S

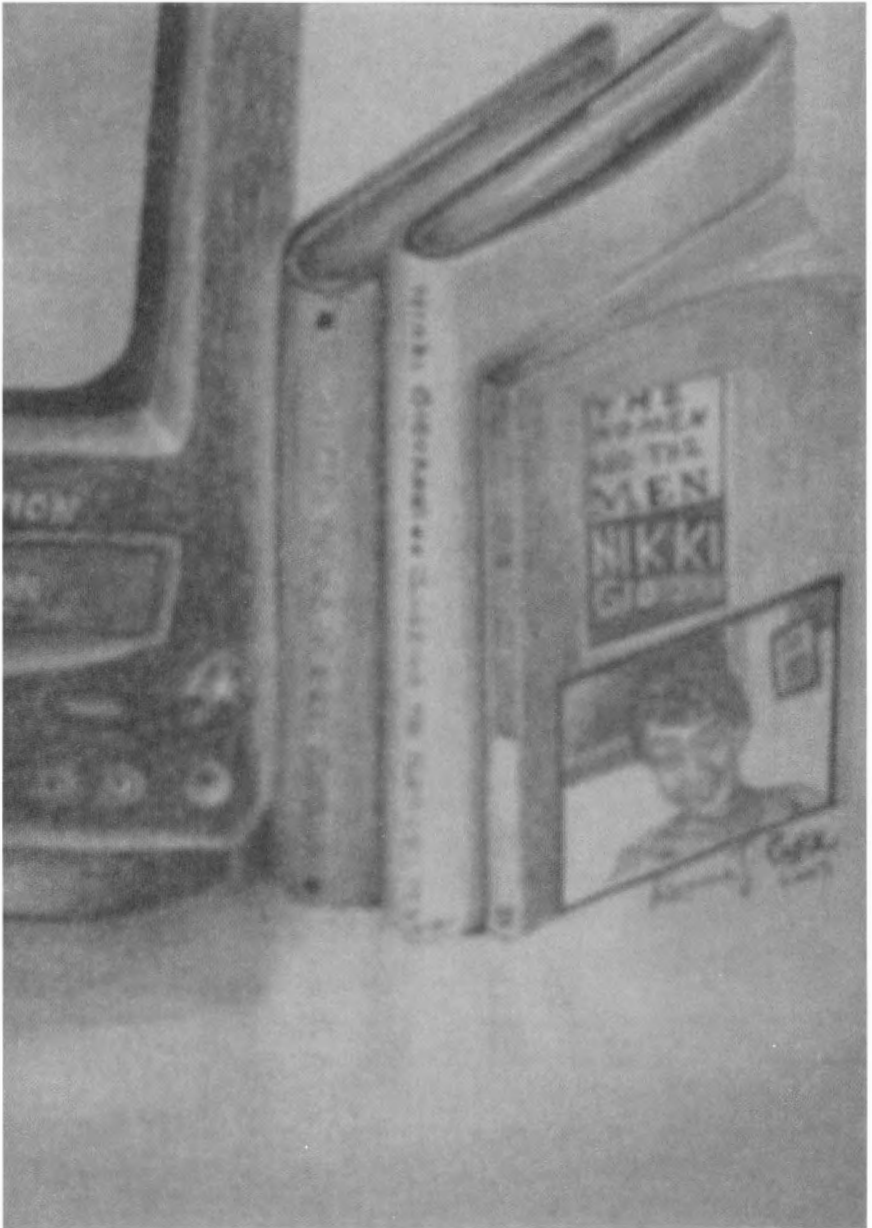
F O R U M



Andrea Rose

Donna Carr

Graphite



Relaxing Times

Donna Carr

Graphite

Ode To The Library

Joan Scott

I love to visit the library
I go there every day
I find so much food for my mind
I hope it will never stray.

I can read about the Amazon
Or far off distant lands
Sometimes I only have time for the books
My professor demands.

I still love to go there
I can learn to my heart's content
I can take a trip to anywhere
It's the best money I've never spent!





Reflections

Unknown

Photograph



Lilac Still Life

Gail Ingalsbe

Photograph

The Tulip

Laura Beth Pottinger

The winds blow and the velvety tulip
petals wiggle to the moist earth.
Instinctively, my mind wanders into a
world of happiness, as I contemplate
a wonderful creation: The Tulip.
The crisp, fresh air blows through the
blossom stem, making the colorful
blossom dance.
Happiness has come to the heart of this
bloom: dancing, moving, active.
Through many things, happiness appears
naturally.
Imagination—happiness is created.
A light of joy will gleam through
natural happiness.
A tulip.



Left:

Sherri's Tulip

Sherri Powell

Oils



Garden Promenade

Laura Beth Pottinger

Oil on canvas

One Word

Renae Wilkerson

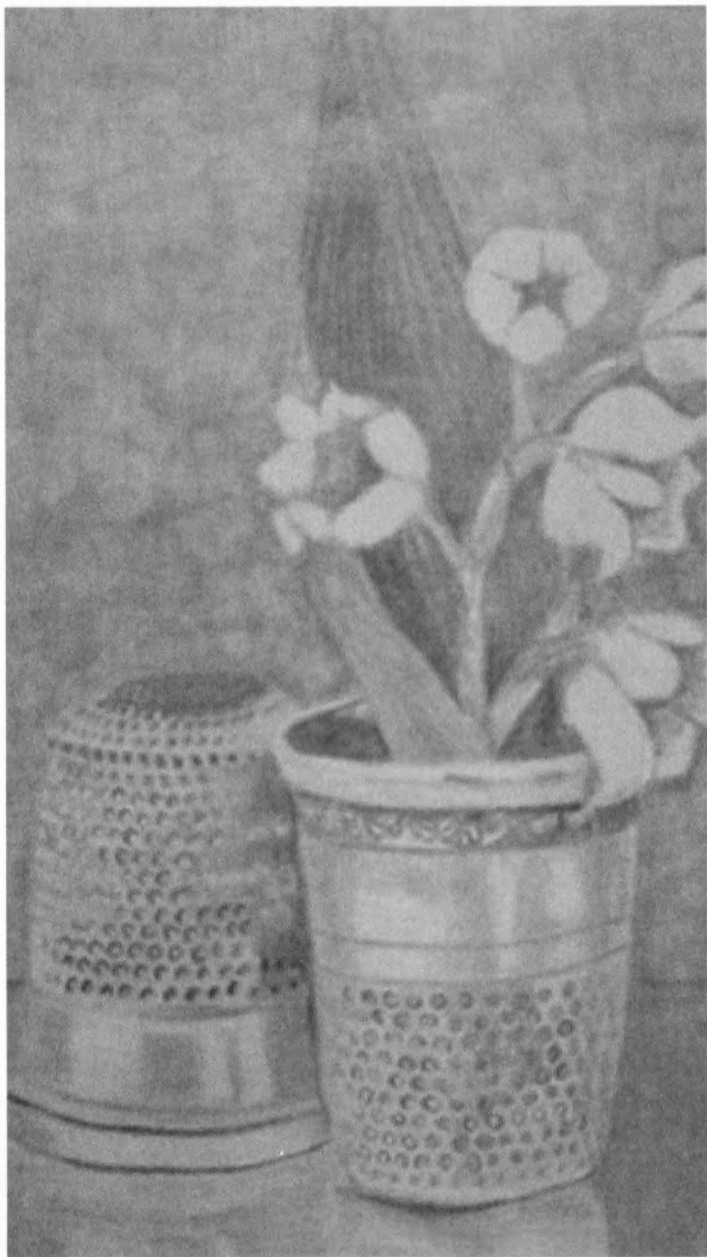
6 a.m., another day
Roll out of bed and make my way
Next door down, wake up” you know who”,
Then struggle and fight to wake kid #2.
“Mom, braid my hair.”
“Hey, Mom, where’s my shoes?”,
They’ll need mom 100 times,
Before the 7:00 news!
Seven already? Mom becomes wife,
Back up the stairs to
Wake the love of my life.
Breakfast is ready, let’s all go eat,
Ummm...the cook did good-didn’t she?
Just enough time to tie up loose ends,
And always 10 minutes to check on my friend.
Oops, just a minute,
Let me wash just this dish.
Did I forget anything....feed the fish!
Whew..everything’s done, now I’ve got to go,
Classes are starting in a minute or so.
For the next several hours,
A student I’ll be,
(Until I’m a professional and have a degree!)
But rest assured, by 3:00 I’ll be home,
And I’ll once again be all the people that you’ve come to know
I am a Mother, I am a wife,
I am a cook, I’m here for life,
I am a friend, I’m also a maid,
I do it all, without being paid,
I am a student, I have a plan,
Just one word will sum up all that I am....
Woman



Misty Morning

Jo Koenig

Acrylic



Thimbles

Graphite

Gail Ingalsbe



Waiting

Sherri Bolden

Watercolor

I Meant To Pick Wild Flowers Pat Sowards

Instead,
I bring you songs
of apple blossom,
of violets,
and redbud too alive to pick,
of new-green maple spinners
and ancient melodies
sung anew
by this year's
red-winged blackbirds.

Pat Sowards was a member of the
Phoenix Writers and a teacher at
Northwest Schools.

Deceased, June 2003

Submitted by Kris Liles as a memorial
and tribute to Pat



Lessons From Outside Paradise

Lisa Jones

The river ran choppy and unsettled as Lisa and her grandmother sat on the bank of the Ohio. It was their favorite talking place. Something about the river and the moving water calmed Lisa's spirit. But today her spirit was as unsettled as the muddy water rushing past them.

"In two days you are going to be married, my dear," her grandmother said, "Why such the long face?"

Lisa could not answer that question. To do so would open up the floodgates of her misery, and she would not and could not let that happen. Her only defense was to bury it deep inside herself where no one could ever reach it.

"Two days huh," Lisa forced a laugh. "An I'll be an old married woman."

Married and woman were two terms that sounded like they didn't fit on a girl who had just turned 18 not a week ago.

"Well, you don't have to get married," her grandmother replied, searching Lisa's face with knowing eyes that still gleamed with the fire of youth.

The granddaughter's clear green eyes would not meet her gaze directly and darted everywhere, looking for a safe place to focus.

"You remember," her grandmother continued, "when you were a child I used to say you had a Mona Lisa smile; remember that?"

Lisa did remember, and she swallowed hard and shook her head.

"I always thought you were so cute when you were intent on some book you were reading or some story you were writing, and you wouldn't show anyone till it was finished. You would just look at me and smile, not just with your mouth but your eyes too," the grandmother's voiced cracked as she looked at the bent head of her granddaughter. "That smile suggests you know the secrets of the world inside your heart and you aren't telling," she said. She took her hand and gently lifted Lisa's head to force her gaze on her. "Right now, I don't see that smile, not on your lips, and not in your eyes. Are you sure you want to get married?"

Lisa had not given her impending marriage much thought at all. The realization of this obvious lack of serious contemplation suddenly alarmed her. Then she thought of her future husband. He was a preacher's son. He had a good job and came from a good family. And most of all he was safe. He didn't have a temper. He didn't try to make her do things she didn't want to do. And she loved him. Love in the way family loves each other with prejudice and without question.

"Yes, I am sure," Lisa said, this time with confidence in her voice.

Lisa had been raised in a strict, religious family. She was not a preacher's daughter, but she may as well have been. There were generations of preachers and teachers and church elders in her family; her grandmother was

a prominent one. John Newton was her eighth great grandfather, and she was never to forget it. Everyone expected Lisa to follow in her grandmother's footsteps and her family's tradition. She was not allowed to do most things her friends did, and she soon learned that the very nature of living might be considered a sin.

She was constantly reminded of her sanctified condition and felt the distance from the world it created in every fiber of her being. Her grandmother loved her deeply as did her entire family, but the fear, instilled by religion, left its mark. She knew what was expected of her and was afraid of not living up to it. She was raised in a Walt Disney World existence and expected the world outside to eventually measure up.

Until six months ago she truly believed in such ideals. Men existed to don shining armor and whisk her away to Neverland. Until that is, the Disney world melted when life got too real. This ugly scar across the face of her Snow White existence had changed her. And she couldn't tell anyone.

Lisa had gone steady with Rodger for more than a year. She had dated several boys, but they were mostly from church or down the road, and they were the equivalent of some ancient friend of the family whom you kiss on the mouth when they leave.

Then she met him. And Rodger was different. He came from a different town, and no one knew his family. He smoked cigarettes and cussed, which, if her parents had known, would have been enough to make her stay away from him. But it was the exact reason she found him so irresistible. He was wild and full of a life that was completely foreign to her. He laughed at her naïve ways and many times made fun of her innocence of worldly affairs, saying she must have been raised on a hillside like the Waltons.

She had never been allowed to go anywhere by herself for very long. After awhile and after many visits to her parents she was subsequently trusted to go with Rodger and not come home till after midnight. Such freedom was intoxicating. She became a different girl when she was with him. Her parents didn't believe in jeans and shorts on girls and insisted she never wear shorts on a date. But with him she had freedom. He brought the sinful attire, and she changed frequently into them when they were together, changing back before she went home. This would later give her a reason to carry the guilt she held onto for so long.

It was a cold New Year's Eve. Her mother did not want her to go to the New Year's Eve dance and party afterward.

"It's just not Christian," her mother protested.

In the end she let Lisa go with the admonishment to "take off those pants and dress like a lady at least." So in her flimsy church dress Lisa went with Rodger to the dance. They didn't stay long, and Lisa was nervous because some older kids brought alcohol. Rodger, who was always inclined to succumb to peer pressure, drank several beers and shoved several more to Lisa.

Her hands shook as she nervously smiled and opened the can.

"Come on honey," Rodger sneered, "live a little. Your old man won't know a thing."

Something about the way he spoke of her father made her angry. He wasn't an old man, she thought defiantly. She suppressed her anger and opened the can of beer. While Rodger was busy talking to the other boys, Lisa secretly poured the beer out. Some of the other girls noticed and whispered among themselves that she just didn't fit in with the crowd.

"I heard she goes to church a lot and reads books all the time and doesn't even take the pill," they snickered.

"Well, ol' Rodg' 'll give her an education," they laughed.

"Let's go woman," Rodger demanded. "We got business to take care of." He winked over Lisa's shoulder as they climbed into his truck.

The Seven Sisters were out clear and bright in the blackness of the night.

"Look at the moon," Lisa said. "See that imprint on the side. It says JWS which stands for Jesus Will Save, can you see it?" Lisa exclaimed with a joy in her voice that Rodger did not comprehend. Rodger pulled into a secluded park and shut off the truck. It overlooked the river, in front of a bridge with lights spanning the distance. The lights reflected in the turbulent water, and the trees surrounding this haven bowed their heads towards the truck as if they watched the unfolding scene. Lisa thought it was all very romantic.

She was also used to the parking. They did this every time they met, and she always insisted that they would not go all the way. Rodger grew more insistent with each passing date that if she loved him, she would allow sex. They kissed and touched and even a few times she let him partially undress her. She would always stop him after a point, even when her body didn't want to, because she knew in her heart it was wrong. And she did not want to get pregnant. And she didn't want her first time to be in a truck. She wanted the fairy-tale romances she had read about and assumed it was her right as a woman that she have it. Rodger on the other hand thought certain other things were his right, and he was determined to have them.

"C'mon baby," he pleaded.

The insistence in his hands matched the insistence in his voice. His mouth covered hers in a possessive manner as he pushed her heavily down into the truck seat. Her head banged against the cold steel of the door handle.

"Wait," she breathed out before his mouth clamped down over hers.

His hands groped for the ends of her dress. Lisa wished she had been less of a Christian and wore her jeans. The dress made it all the easier.

"Please," she cried.

Please was all she could manage to say. Every time she tried to speak he forced his mouth down on hers and sucked the protest from her lips. For a moment she was overcome with nausea and thought she might actually vomit in his mouth.

"If I could just run, I could make it home," she thought.

This was a ridiculous idea since she was miles from home. His tongue tasted sour from the beer and strong of cigarettes, and the way he kissed her felt full of power.

"Yeah baby, all the girls say please when they want it bad," his voice rasped with lust. He sat up to unzip his pants and gave her enough time to beg him.

"Please," she said again, "please, Rodger--- No, I don't want this." There were tears in her words.

He couldn't hear her. His lust was deafening. His manhood was in this power and control over her, to force her. It was after all his god-given right to be the head of his woman as he had heard in his grandmother's Pentecostal church. This power was almost as intoxicating as her body, and he used it to take her without any remorse.

Her body constricted against the unwelcome foreign presence. He pushed on anyway, oblivious to her pain and rejection, and her head banged in rhythm to his insistence against the metal door of the truck.

She looked up into the night sky. The Seven Sisters hid their faces behind their black veils. The Moon kept its omnipotent vigil looking down at her. Watching her sin.

"When you wish upon a star" was the theme to the Wonderful World of Disney and always echoed inside her mind whenever she watched the night sky. Tonight there were no stars. They were all gone.

Thump, thump her head banged against the door handle. He had consumed her and yet she was entirely alone. One tear ran down her cheek as she looked through the window of the truck into the blackness of the night. She traced the JWS in the moon with her eyes and wondered if He would save her.

As he finished he told her, "You'll be glad baby...you'll be glad."

That was six months ago. Rodger stopped speaking to her two weeks after the rape. He told his male friends at school the details, and they dictated it to her in the halls between classes. She nearly had a nervous breakdown and everyday watched and prayed that her stomach would not grow.

"If I am pregnant," she thought, "I will run away and kill myself."

Killing herself would have been easier to deal with than facing her parents with her sin. Abortion was out of the question because that was a sin too. Telling anyone would be admitting that she did not live up to the standard, and it would never be forgotten. God Himself would have no mercy on one who knew better in the first place. She should not have worn shorts in front of him. She knew her mother would say that this sin enticed him to act upon desires for which he had no control. It was entirely her fault. So she would handle it all alone.

The rage and anger inside her coiled like a serpent and squeezed the life out of the joy that once occupied her soul. Every day she fed it on the

squirming flesh of her memory. Her innocence was replaced with distrust and fear and self-loathing. She built walls around her emotions and escape hatches for her passions and she resolved to never be hurt again. She became schizophrenic in her pretense and showed a smile when inside a fury raged.

She knew what the Bible meant when it said that, "ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones." These were the bones of the knights in the fairy tales. They were vanquished and just like her, didn't exist.

The long forlorn whistle of a train jolted Lisa back to the present and the voice of her grandmother.

"Hear that whistle?" she exclaimed. "In Tennessee the old time fiddlers always called that the High Lonesome Sound, and you know they may be right." She looked at her granddaughter, stroked her hair, and continued, "You know my dear, life can be compared to that old train. You set out along your path and every now and then you make choices or something is added to your life that will tag along with you on your journey. It may be a pretty car that is easy to pull or it may be an ugly one full of pitch black coal. You have to take the good with the bad and hope that the good will make the bad worth the effort.

"Everything is how you perceive it Lisa. Bad things will happen to you as well as good things, and you have to learn from them both. That whistle on that train could seem as a high lonesome sad mourn for the load it's carrying. But it could also be a victory yell to all who will listen that no matter the heaviness of its burden, it won't slow down and it won't give up till it reaches its destination.

"My daddy used to work on those trains and he said the most popular trains with the most character were those that could pull the heaviest loads and still have the steam to make their whistle heard. When others heard it on down the line they were encouraged.

"We women need to encourage our fellow burden bearers instead of adding to the load. Women are born with the odds stacked against them, my dear, sighed her grandmother. As you start your life you will soon find this out.

"We are forever trying to make up for that darn apple in ourselves and in each other. But you can't change the past; you can only move forward, carrying whatever mistakes or good fortunes you have gotten on your way. Just remember that you control how you deal with it; no one else can take that power from you. You can mourn or you can sing. That choice is yours.

"Are you still listening my dear?" she laughed. "You know, my love, being a woman can be dangerous to your health...and your sanity."

At this grandmother and granddaughter laughed together and listened as the train whistled its way down the track.

Lisa got married and settled down to a life of details and particulars. In nine months she had a son and responsibilities and troubles on every side. If character is bred by adversity, then she oozed character from every pore. At every turn she thought of herself last and her family, her community and her dog's best interest first. She pushed her dreams and her Walt Disney hopes to the darkest recesses of her soul and never allowed them to surface from their prison.

She was strong for everyone else and weak for no one but the lost girl inside the shell. Everyone counted on her and asked her advice never once guessing the misery that she silently towed behind her. She abandoned religion and the sexist rules that she was bound to and took up faith instead.

Then one day she passed him on the street. Rodger had a beaten, worn down look about him that made him look much older than he was. He didn't see her and she almost felt sorry for him. He didn't look like the powerful monster that raged in her nightmares and caused her such pain. He looked like the weak, sick coward that he was.

Suddenly, the words of her grandmother filled her thoughts to overflowing and her mind with understanding. "Just remember that you control how you deal with it, no one else can take that power from you. You can mourn or you can sing," Lisa remembered.

Her soul was filled with aching memories of her grandmother, her childhood and the peace and joy she had let go of since the rape. She hated him yet blamed herself for what had happened. Inside she felt the stirrings of her childlike faith and innocence that was still alive, hidden away in her internal prison and sealed shut with the stoic set of her jaw. He hadn't stolen it from her, she had given it up, laid it down and she didn't have to.

"That is where the power lies, Lisa thought to herself. Men like Rodger use their physical power to intimidate women to let go of their control and their choice over their own minds and bodies. They summon religion to reinforce their claim upon the rights and wills of their supposed weak subjects. They only succeed when women are fooled into believing that they must succumb to the tyranny that surrounds them."

With this realization the walls came down. The closed up emotions came cascading out from the depths of her soul and watered the dreams that grew from the death of her martyrdom. She could live and not feel ashamed. . She could live and not feel ashamed. God was just as He had said, "no respecter of persons." She could make mistakes and even sin and realize that this made her human. Perfect people did not need a Savior; only sinners did. Wearing shorts was not a sin. Being raped was not a sin. Living a lie, and backing down from an abuser probably was.

Joy came seeping back into her being, and drowned the coiled serpent of hatred. She had carried enough guilt to pay penance for her sins, and every other woman since Eve, and she decided it was time to stop.

"I refuse to feel guilty for that apple any longer," Lisa laughed, and remembering her grandmother, she smiled.



Mother's Love

Unknown

Photograph

Pilgrimage To Pikeville

Pat Sowards

I feel as if,
sequestered here
in some place of solitude,
I stood long enough,
my feet would root
in this,
my native soil;
from my body,
branches would sprout,
where mocking bird might nest
in spring.

I like to think
I would become an oak,
sugar maple, redbud, dogwood,
but, probably,
given my nature,
I would emerge
a weeping willow.

Pat Sowards was a member of the
Phoenix Writers and a teacher at
Northwest Schools.
Deceased, June 2003
Submitted by Kris Liles as a memorial
and tribute to Pat

Emerging

Jennifer R. Phillips

I was lonely, quiet, and shy. When I joked, it was only in desperation of gaining some inkling of affection from anyone, and when attentions were shown to me, I'd overcompensate in the hopes of grasping the weak strings of that temporary affection, praying the entire time that they would not snap. I was a typical American adolescent female who felt anything *but* normal, and was willing to try anything to make me feel so.

I never saw that out of hatred would grow love, out of self-loathing would grow a dearness for my own self, that out of the depths of despair and desperate neediness would emerge a woman, bruised and battered but nevertheless resilient.

It never occurred to me before that in order to truly be beautiful, you have to be scarred.

I used to feel like this ugly shell that I dragged along, soul hidden deep beneath hard, bony layers in the hopes that it could not be damaged, a delicate organ too tender to be exposed to the elements. My eyes hidden beneath the thick fringe of hair, looking about fearfully, pale hands quivering, anticipating the next blow from whoever decided that day that I should be called ugly.

One day I crashed. His words were an utterance of one of my perceived flaws—I was too skinny. It was one of those things I'd tell myself that no one else noticed but me—a little lie to get me through the day. I'd look in the mirror and see the obvious cheekbones, the awful collarbones peeking over the collars of my shirts, my skinny, pale legs and arms. What he implied was what I could read on people's faces when they saw my little figure—they thought that I starved myself. This was a lethal blow. If an adult felt the need to point out my ugliness, then it must be really, really bad. His question pierced all of my layers, penetrating the protective shell and spearing the precious small scrap of confidence I held so tightly. What he and others did not know is that I actually gorged myself until my stomach hurt, committing a deadly sin, in order to be beautiful. I wanted more than anything to have a more womanly physique like the cheerleaders, who exuded confidence and strength from supple

and able bodies. I, on the other hand, was easily snapped and broken.

The sun hurt me. With too much time outdoors in summer, my fair skin turned an unhealthy red, swelled and blistered. But I was willing to pay this price for the ultimate prize---a "healthy," golden, popular girl tan. I would swelter through the hottest days of the year in jeans, never daring to expose my bare legs, because it was easier to hide them than to have to do damage control to my self-esteem at the end of a day full of teasing because I was pale.

Over and over, I would burn myself purposefully, lying outside in the hot sun, in the backyard where no one could see how ugly I was. I'd cry at night, feeling the scratchy sheets against my boiled skin, and swear I'd never do it again. But I always knew I would.

I could never look pretty, no matter how hard I tried, and if anyone said I did, I didn't believe them. I knew that any comments from boys were false, that they were secretly laughing at my ugliness, and that they should not be believed. I tried to ignore their comments, but I knew that the color that rose to my cheeks out of shame betrayed me. I unwillingly showed them that I agreed.

Schoolwork wasn't hard, but I tried not to do it because unless you were pretty, you weren't allowed to be smart too. I'd mess up tests on purpose, and I would act like I didn't know answers when I was called upon. To all of them, there was nothing worse than a smart, ugly girl. I put myself in my place. I stopped raising my hand.

I was young and too thoughtful. And because my peers would not return my affections, I began to slowly degrade myself until nothing remained of my confidence or original vigor. They didn't understand it at the time, but they were slowly killing me, but I was to be reborn, a Phoenix, a butterfly, resurrected.

Instead of demanding of others that they take me as I was, I demanded of myself that I fit their mold. Instead of screaming out against those who pained me so much, I screamed at myself for giving them a reason to pain me. Instead of loving myself, I

loved the thing they thought I should be, and worshipped this image, paying homage to it each day by showing myself how much better my life would be if I were this thing

This thing was impossible to become. In order to transform into it, I needed a different face, with less freckles and greener eyes. I needed a slim, yet curvaceous body, which clothing would always fit perfectly. I needed a tan, a haircut, and sparkling white teeth. The last three could plausibly be obtained, but would be worthless without the former items listed. Magazines and television invariably shoved this image down my throat.

I would see those witty little tricks in magazines and on television on how to boost your self-esteem. You are supposed to be able to look people in the eye and show them how confident you are and how unique and individually pretty you think you are. You also shouldn't care what others think, and you should be happy with your body, because it's all you have. But everyone knows that it is impossible to walk into a room proudly when you feel so ugly inside and out. Anyone knows that when you hate yourself, one fleeting remark about your clothes or how you laugh isn't very fleeting at all. It will nag you for days. It is not until you realize that you really, truly recognize what beauty is that you will be able to put that nagging voice behind you and step confidently into a room.

After so many years in my body, I realized that it was mine to keep, whether I liked it or not. I began to see that this fair skin, these freckles, this whole package was mine, to either destroy or to celebrate. I was sick of the former, so I decided to try the latter. I stopped caring what people thought when I raised my hand in class. I voiced my opinions in my school newspaper and started worrying less about the way I looked and more about the person I could become.

And so I cast away my awful shell. I felt like I was beginning all over again, and felt very young and tender indeed. Sometimes, that little nagging voice would come back, and I would want more than anything to run away and hide. But I began to actually see the beauty that was fighting to emerge all

along. I was the one killing it by being so afraid to let it show.

I began to realize that not everyone can look like a movie star, and that even they had a lot of help from airbrushes and makeup artists. I began to take compliments, and not fear that they were just insults in disguise.

I also began to see the people whom I had grown up with, and took special notice of those who had made my life so terrible. Who were they to ever say a word about who I was or what I looked like? I was beginning to feel angry for all of my lost time in hiding.

My wings began to unfurl, tenderly, drying in the harsh light of the world. Dare I test them and risk them being torn irreparably? If I showed the world that I wanted to fly and felt that I deserved to, would they laugh?

Then I realized the painful truth: yes, they would laugh. And they would stare. But I knew I was normal the entire time, and, even when I feel so very ugly on the outside, I just try to feel the girl inside trying to get out. She's small, but she's scrappy and determined to stand up to any blow. They can't knock me down anymore.

I am twenty-one now. I am scarred and still sore from every comment ever made about me. Twenty-one years of turning others' abuses into self-abuse. I am just thankful that I realized this before it was too late.

Have you ever noticed that the life we live interferes with our nature? We wake when we want to sleep, we go hungry when we need to eat, and we toil endlessly to build a life for ourselves, only to waste away that which we are working for. To any girl out there who feels ugly, ask yourself: what *is* ugly? I will tell you. Ugly is self-loathing, self-denial; listening to whatever negativity the world decides to throw at you.

Listen to me. That girl inside is beautiful. *Let her out.*

Lovingly dedicated to the memories of:



Elyse Saperstein
1951-2002



Leslie Williams
1941-2001

For more information on the Women's Forum, go to:
www.shawnee.edu/comm/wforum

